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THE SEMINAR OF
JACQUES LACAN
Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller

BOOK II

The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the
Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955

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aware of Freud, nor those who might specifically qualify themselves as Freudians, ever neglecting it. The question is to know whether this element should be given pre-eminent importance in the constitution of the subject. Let us leave to one side for a moment the theoretical discussion which this may raise, and let us see what it leads to.

Apropos of the dream of Irma's injection, it leads to some remarks which I will try to point out to you, as I will have to encounter them in the re-analysis which I will try to conduct today. You will be surprised to see that this culturalism converges quite singularly with a psychologism which consists in understanding the entire analytic text as a function of the various stages in the development of the *ego*. You see that it isn't simply the desire to chaff his synchronisation which led me to mention Hartmann.

The attempt is made, then, to locate the dream of Irma's injection as a stage in the development of Freud's *ego*, an *ego* which has a right to a certain respect, for it is that of a great creator, at a highpoint of his creative capacity. In truth, one cannot say it is a false ideal. Of course there must be a psychology of the creator. But is it the lesson we have to draw from the Freudian experience, and more especially, if we examine it under the microscope, is it the lesson we must draw from what takes place in the dream of Irma's injection?

If this point of view is true, we will have to abandon the notion I tell you to be the essence of the Freudian discovery, the decentering of the subject in relation to the *ego*, and to return to the notion that everything centres on the standard development of the *ego*. That is an alternative without mediation – if that is true, everything I say is false.

Except, if what I say is false, it becomes extremely difficult to read the slightest of Freud's texts and understand anything in it. We shall put it to the test with the dream of Irma's injection.

Why does Freud give such importance to this dream? At first glance, this may be surprising. What, in fact, does Freud extract from the analysis of this dream? This truth, which he posits as primary, that the dream is always the fulfilment of a desire, of a wish [*souhait*].

I will read you the contents of the dream, hoping that this will be enough to bring to mind the analysis which follows it.

A large hall – many guests, whom we receive. – Among them Irma, whom I immediately take aside, as if to answer her letter, and to reproach her that she doesn't accept the 'solution' yet. I say to her: 'If you still have pains, it is really only your fault.' – She answers: 'If you knew what pains I have now in my throat, stomach and abdomen, it's tightening me up.' – I am startled and look at her. She looks pallid and puffy; I think, after all I am overlooking something organic. I take her to the window and look into her throat. With that she shows some resistance, like women who wear a denture. I think to myself, she doesn't need to do that. – Her mouth then opens properly, and I find on the right a large white spot, and elsewhere I see some remarkable

*curled structures which evidently are patterned on the nasal turbinal bones, extensive white-grey scabs. – I quickly call Dr M., who repeats and confirms the examination . . . Dr M. looks entirely different from usual; he is very pallid, limps, is beardless on the chin . . . My friend Otto now also stands next to her, and my friend Leopold percusses her over the bodice and says: 'She has a dullness below on the left,' points also to an infiltrated portion of the skin on the left shoulder (which I, in spite of the dress, just as he, feel) . . . M. says: 'Without a doubt, it's an infection, but it doesn't matter; dysentery will follow and the poison will be eliminated . . . We also directly know where the infection comes from. Recently my friend Otto, when she was not feeling well, gave her an injection of a preparation of propyl. propylene . . . propionic acid . . . trimethylamine (whose formula I see in heavy type before me) . . . one doesn't give such injections so lightly . . . Probably, too, the syringe wasn't clean.'*¹

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Irma is a patient friend of Freud's family. So, with respect to her, he is thus in that delicate situation, always to be avoided, in which the analyst is attending on someone in the circle of his acquaintances. We are much more aware than Freud was, at this pre-historic stage of analysis, of the difficulties, in such a case, of a counter-transference.

That is indeed what happens. Freud has great difficulties with Irma. As he points it out to us in the associations to the dream, he still thinks, at this point in time, that, once the unconscious meaning of the fundamental conflict of the neurosis has been discovered, one only has to put it to the subject, who either accepts or doesn't accept it. If he doesn't accept it, it's his fault, he is a nasty, naughty boy, a bad patient. If he's good, he accepts, and everything is fine and dandy. I'm not pushing anything – there are good and bad patients.

Freud recounts this idea to us with a humour bordering on the rather improvised irony I am indulging in on this subject. He says that he can thank heaven that this was his conception at that time, for it allowed him to make a living.

So, he is in a lot of trouble with Irma, who has certainly improved, but retains certain symptoms, in particular a tendency to vomit. He has just interrupted the treatment, and his friend Otto is bringing him news of his former patient.

In the past, I've underlined that Otto is someone very close to Freud. But he isn't an intimate friend, in the sense of being privy to the ideas of someone who is already a master. He is a good chap. Otto, he does a bit of looking after the

¹ The translation given here follows that of Patrick J. Mahony, 'Towards a formalist approach to dreams', *Int. J. Psch.* 4, 1977, 83–98. Mahony points out that the translation of dreams in SE renders them into the imperfect tense, whereas Freud's text gives them in the present; see GW II/III 112; Stud II 127; SE IV 107. Moreover, Freud makes theoretical remarks concerning the significance of the fact that the tense of all dreams is the present – GW II/III 539–40; Stud II 544–5; SE V 534–5.

entire family, when there are colds about, when things aren't going too well, and his role in the household is that of the friendly, benevolent bachelor, the bringer of gifts. This elicits a certain amused irony in Freud.

The Otto in question, for whom he has genuine, though measured, respect, brings him news of the said Irma, and tells him that, in short, she's alright, but not as well as all that. Histone makes Freud think that dear friend Otto somewhat disapproves of him, or more exactly that the latter must have had a share in his circle's gloating, even in the opposition he faced in relation to this cure imprudently undertaken on terrain where he is not as much the master of the manoeuvres as he would like.

Indeed, Freud has the feeling that he has in fact put the right solution to Irma – *Lösung*. This word has the same ambiguity in German as in French – that is as much the solution that one injects as the solution of a conflict. With that, the dream of Irma's injection is already acquiring its symbolic meaning.

At the start, Freud is pretty displeased with his friend. That is because he is even more displeased with himself. He gets to the point of doubting the validity of the solution he's proposed, perhaps even the very principle of his treatment of neuroses.

In this year 1895, he is still at the experimental stage in which he makes his major discoveries, amongst which the analysis of this dream will always seem to him so important that in 1900, in a letter to Fliess, just after the publication of the book in which he relates it, he will entertain himself – though his ways of having fun are never quite inconsequential – by imagining that one day perhaps there will be inscribed, on the threshold of the house in the country at Bellevue where this dream took place – *In this house on July 24th, 1895, the secret of dreams was revealed to Dr Sigmund Freud.*²

So, as well as being displeased, Freud at this time is full of confidence. Note it is before the crisis of 1897, a trace of which we find in the letter to Fliess, when he was to think for a moment that the entire trauma theory based on seduction, which was central to the genesis of his conception, had to be rejected, and the whole of his edifice was crumbling away. In 1895 he is in a creative period, as susceptible to ^{have} certainty as to doubt – which is a feature of the entire development of the discovery.

The disapproval he senses in Otto's voice is the little shock which sets his dream into motion.

Let me point out that as early as 1882, Freud had remarked, in a letter to his fiancée, that it wasn't so much the major preoccupations of the day which made an appearance in dreams, as themes which had been embarked upon and were then interrupted – as when you're cut off.³ The cutting off of speech struck Freud very early on, and we come upon it again and again in his

² Letter dated 12 June 1900, *Origins*, p. 322. ³ Letter dated 30 June 1882.

analyses in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. I have already discussed with you the forgetting of the name of the painter of the Orvieto fresco. What was at issue then was also something which hadn't completely come out during the day.

That, however, is far from being the case here. Freud started work in the evening after dinner, and had written an entire résumé of the Irma case, as a way of putting things straight, and of justifying, if needs be, the general conduct of the treatment.

Then comes the night. With this dream.

I'll go straight to the conclusion. Freud considers it a great success being able to explain this dream in all its detail, by the desire to be relieved of his responsibility for the failure of Irma's treatment. He does so in the dream – as the artisan of the dream – in so many ways that, as he remarks with his customary humour, it bears a great resemblance to the story of the person who, upon being reproached with returning a kettle with a hole in it, answers firstly, that he returned it intact and that secondly, the kettle already had a hole in it when he borrowed it and that thirdly, he hadn't borrowed it. Each of these explanations on its own would be perfectly valid, but taken together can in no way satisfy us.

That's how this dream is conceived, Freud tells us. And, of course, we find there the thread of everything which appears in the dream. But the question in my view is rather more like this – how is it that Freud, who later on will develop the function of unconscious desire, is here content, for the first step in his demonstration, to present a dream which is entirely explained by the satisfaction of a desire which one cannot but call preconscious, and even entirely conscious? Didn't Freud spend the previous evening trying to put down in black and white a justification as much of what works as what doesn't?

To establish this formula, that in every case the dream is the satisfaction of a desire, Freud doesn't seem, on first impression, to have required anything more than the most general notion of desire, nor to have been much preoccupied with knowing what this desire is, nor from whence it comes – from the unconscious or the preconscious.

Freud then raises the question in the note which I read out to you last time – what is it, this unconscious desire? What is it, this thing which is pushed away and horrifies the subject? What does it mean to speak of an unconscious desire? For whom does this desire exist?

This is the level where we'll find clarification of the immense satisfaction which the solution Freud gives of the dream brings him. To gain for ourselves a full sense of the fact that this dream plays a decisive role in Freud's account, we must take into account the importance which Freud grants it, all the more significant for seeming paradoxical to us. At first sight, one might say that the decisive step hasn't been taken, since in the end it is only a preconscious desire

which emerges. But if he maintains that this dream is the dream of dreams, the initial, typical dream, it is because he has the feeling of having taken it, this step, and the account which follows shows only too well that he has indeed taken it. If he has the feeling that he has taken it, it's because he has.

I am not redoing the analysis of Freud's dream after Freud himself. That would be absurd. Just as it is out of the question to analyse dead authors, so it is out of the question to analyse his own dream better than Freud. Freud has his reasons for breaking off the associations. He tells us – *At this point, I can't tell you any more than this, I don't want to tell stories of bed and chamber pot – or else – Here I no longer feel inclined to continue to associate.* It is not a matter of carrying out an exegesis where Freud interrupts himself but for us to take the whole of the dream and its interpretation. That's where we are in a different position from that of Freud.

There are two operations – having the dream, and interpreting it. Interpreting is an operation in which we intervene. But don't forget that in the majority of cases, we also intervene in the first. In an analysis, we intervene not only in that we interpret the dream of the subject – if indeed we do interpret it – but, on account of our already being, as analyst, in the life of the subject, we are already in his dream.

Remember, in this society's inaugural lecture, what I talked to you about apropos of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real. I was using these categories in the form of small and capital letters.

iS – imagining the symbol, putting the symbolic discourse into a figurative form, namely the dream.

sI – symbolising the image, making a dream-interpretation.

Except, for that there has to be a reversion, the symbol has to be symbolised. In between, there's room for understanding what happens in this double transformation. That is what we are going to try to do – take this dream and the interpretation which Freud gives of it as a whole, and see what it signifies in the symbolic and the imaginary order.

We are lucky that this famous dream, which, as will be only too obvious to you, we'll be treating with the greatest respect, isn't, because it is a dream, in time. It is very easy to observe, and it constitutes precisely the originality of dreams – the dream is not in time.

There is something absolutely striking – none of the authors in question draws attention to this fact, in its purity. Erikson comes close to it, but unfortunately, his culturalism isn't a very useful tool for him. This culturalism obliges him to raise the so-called problem of the study of the manifest content of the dream. The dream's manifest content, he tells us, deserves to be placed once again the foreground. On this point, there follows a very confused discussion, based on this opposition between the superficial and the profound, which I beg

you to rid yourselves of. As Gide says in *The Counterfeiters*, there is nothing more profound than the superficial, because there isn't anything profound. But that's besides the point.

You must start from the text, start by treating it, as Freud does and as he recommends, as Holy Writ. The author, the scribe, is only a pen-pusher, and he comes second. The commentaries on the Scriptures were irremediably lost the day when people wanted to get at the psychology of Jeremiah, of Isaiah, of even Jesus Christ. Similarly, when it comes to our patients, please give more attention to the text than to the psychology of the author – the entire orientation of my teaching is that.

Take this text. M. Erikson attaches great importance to the fact that at the beginning, Freud says – *we are receiving*. Thus, he would seem to have a dual personality – he entertains with his wife. It is a small, awaited, birthday party, at which Irma, the friend of the family, is expected. I'm quite happy, in fact, that the *we are receiving* introduces Freud in his identity as head of the family, but that doesn't seem to me to imply a very great duplicity in social function, because *Frau Doktor* makes no appearance at all, not for one minute.

As soon as Freud enters into dialogue, the visual field shrinks. He takes Irma aside and starts reproaching her, inveighing against her – *It is really all your fault, if you would listen to me it would get better*. Inversely, Irma tells him – *You don't know how much it hurts here and here, and there, in the throat, belly, stomach*. And then she says that it *zusammenschnüren*, that it chokes her.⁴ This *zusammenschnüren* seems vividly expressive to me.

MME X: *In the old days, three or four people were needed to pull on the laces of a corset to tighten it.*

Freud is then quite impressed, and begins to show disquiet. He draws her towards the window and makes her open her mouth.

So all this takes place against a background of discussion and of resistance – resistance not only to what Freud suggests, but also to the examination.

In fact the resistance we have here is the feminine type of resistance. Authors skate over this by talking about so-called Victorian feminine psychology. Because it is well known that women no longer resist us – it doesn't excite us any more, women who resist, and when you come upon feminine resistance, these poor Victorian women are always there to take all the blame. It's quite funny. A consequence of the culturalism which here doesn't succeed in opening Erikson's eyes.

Nonetheless, Freud's associations revolve around this resistance. They emphasise the fact that Irma is far from being the only one implicated although only she appears in the dream. Amongst the people who are *etwas Sträuben*,

⁴ SE gives 'chokes'; Mahony gives 'tightening up'; the French term is 'étouffe'.

there are two in particular who, despite being symmetrical, are nonetheless somewhat problematic – Freud's own wife, who we know from other sources is pregnant at the time, and another woman patient.

We know the immense importance of the role which his wife played in Freud's life. He had not only a familial attachment to her, but also a conjugal, highly idealised one. It does seem, nonetheless, given certain nuances, that on certain levels, she brought him a certain disappointment. As for the patient, she is so to speak the ideal patient, because she isn't Freud's patient, she is quite pretty, and certainly cleverer than Irma, whose capacity for understanding tends to be denigrated. She also has the added attraction of not asking for Freud's help, which allows him to hope that she might one day ask him for it. But to tell the truth he doesn't entertain high hopes of it. In short, the thematic register in which woman appears here and within which the relation to Irma is located extends from the purest professional interest to all the forms of imaginary mirage.

In the dream itself, Freud shows himself as he is, and his *ego* is completely at home on the level of his vigilant *ego*. As psychotherapist, he openly discusses Irma's symptoms, which no doubt are a little, but only slightly, modified compared with what they are in reality. Irma herself is hardly distorted. What she has to show, she would show just the same if one were to look at it closely in the waking state. If Freud analysed his behaviour, his responses, his emotions, his transference at every moment in the dialogue with Irma, he would see just as easily that behind Irma is his wife, her intimate friend, and just as easily the seductive young woman who is just a few steps away and who would make a far better patient than Irma.

This is at the first level, where the dialogue remains subjected to the conditions of the real relation, in so far as it is itself totally stuck within the imaginary conditions which limit it, and which for the moment present Freud with difficulties.

That goes very far. Having got the patient to open her mouth – that is precisely what's at stake in reality, that she doesn't open her mouth – what he sees in there, these turbinate bones covered with a whitish membrane, is a horrendous sight. This mouth has all the equivalences in terms of significations, all the condensations you want. Everything blends in and becomes associated in this image, from the mouth to the female sexual organ, by way of the nose – just before or just after this, Freud has his turbinate bones operated on, by Fliess or by someone else. There's a horrendous discovery here, that of the flesh one never sees, the foundation of things, the other side of the head, of the face, the secretory glands *par excellence*, the flesh from which everything exudes, at the very heart of the mystery, the flesh in as much as it is suffering, is formless, in as much as its form in itself is something which provokes anxiety. Spectre of anxiety, identification of anxiety, the final

revelation of *you are this* – *You are this, which is so far from you, this which is the ultimate formlessness*. Freud comes upon a revelation of the type, *Mene, Tekel, Peres* at the height of his need to see, to know, which was until then expressed in the dialogue of the *ego* with the object. Real desire is there.

Here, Erikson makes an observation which, I must admit, is excellent – normally a dream which leads to that should cause one to awaken. Why doesn't Freud wake up? Because he's a tough customer.

I've got nothing against that – he is a tough customer. So, Erikson adds, as his *ego* is disagreeably stuck in front of this spectacle, this *ego* regresses – the rest of the account is there to tell us that. Erikson then sets up an entire theory of the different stages of the *ego*, with which I will acquaint you. These psychological diversions are certainly extremely instructive, but to me they seem in truth to go against the very spirit of Freudian theory. For, in the end, if the *ego* is this succession of emergences, of shapes, if this double face of good and evil, of realisations and of modes of derealisations constitute its type, one fails to see what can be made of the fact Freud states in a thousand, two thousand different places in his writings, namely that the ego is the sum of the identifications of the subject, with all that that implies as to its radical contingency. If you allow me to give an image of it, the ego is like the superimposition of various coats borrowed from what I would call the *bric-à-brac* of its props department.

Can you really, you analysts, in all honesty, bring me testimonies of these splendid typical developments of the *ego* of subjects? These are tall stories. We are told how this great tree, man, has such a sumptuous development, how throughout his existence he overcomes successive trials, thanks to which he achieves a miraculous equilibrium. A human life is something entirely different! I have already written that in the past, in my lecture on psychogenesis.

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Is it really a question of the regression of the *ego* at the moment when Freud avoids waking up? What we see is that, from this point on, it's no longer a question of Freud. He calls professor M. to his aid because he can't make head or tail of it. This won't get him a better one, a better head or tail.⁵

Doctor M., the circle's dominant figure, as he calls him – I haven't identified who it is – is an entirely respectable character in the everyday life of practice. He has certainly never done Freud a great deal of harm, but he doesn't always agree with him, and Freud isn't the sort of man to accept that easily.

There's also Otto and his chum Leopold, who goes one better than his chum Otto. This gives him considerable merit in Freud's eyes, and he compares the

⁵ The untranslatable pun in French is between '*perdre son latin*' ('no longer understand anything') and '*en donner un meilleur, de latin*' (roughly, 'be given a better one, of Latin').

two of them to Inspector Bräsig and his friend Karl. Inspector Bräsig is a sly one, but he's always wrong, because he fails to take a close look at things. His chum Karl, always at his side, notices them, and all the inspector has to do is follow him.

With this trio of clowns, we see a rambling dialogue built up around little Irma, closer in fact to a game of interrupted conversations, and even to the well-known dialogue of the deaf.

All this is extremely rich and I am just summarising. Then the associations which show us the real meaning of the dream appear. Freud realises that he ends up entirely without blame, according to the logic of the kettle with a hole in it. The three of them are so ridiculous that anyone would seem like a god besides such absurd automata. All these characters are significant, in that each of them is the site of an identification whereby the ego is formed.

Dr M. corresponds to a function which was of capital importance to Freud, that of his half-brother, Philippe, who, as I've told you in another context, was the essential character for the understanding of Freud's Oedipus complex. If Freud's induction into the Oedipus complex was decisive for the history of humanity, it is obviously because he had a father who already had two sons from a first marriage, Emmanuel and Philippe, of similar age, with about three years difference, but who were already old enough for each of them to have been the father of the little Freud, Sigmund, who was born to a mother exactly the same age as this Emmanuel. This Emmanuel was for Freud the object of horror *par excellence*. It was even believed that all the horrors were concentrated on him – erroneously, for Philippe had his share in them. It was him who shopped Freud's dear old nanny, who has been accorded a disproportionate importance, by culturalists wanting to annex Freud to Catholicism with her as intermediary.

It nonetheless remains the case that the members of the intermediate generation played a considerable role. It is a superior form allowing the concentration of aggressive attacks against the father without touching the symbolic father too much, who, as for him, is to be found in a heaven which, without being that of sainthood, is nonetheless extremely important for all that. The symbolic father remains intact thanks to this division of functions.

Dr M. represents the ideal character constituted by the paternal pseudo-image, the imaginary father. Otto corresponds to the character who played a perennial role in Freud's life, the intimate, close friend who is both friend and enemy, who from one hour to the next changes from being a friend to being an enemy. And Leopold plays the role of the character who is always useful to counter the character of the friend-enemy, of the beloved enemy.

Here, then, is an entirely different triad from the preceding one, but which is just as much in the dream. Freud's interpretation allows us to understand its meaning. But what is its role in the dream? It plays with speech, with decisive and adjudicating speech, with the law, with what torments Freud under the

form – Am I right or wrong? Where is the truth? What is the outcome of the problem? Where am I placed?

The first time around, accompanying Irma's ego we've found three feminine characters. Freud remarks that there is such a profusion of intercalations at this point that in the end things are knotted together and one ends up confronted with some unknown mystery.

When we analyse this text, we must take into account the text in its entirety, including the notes. This is when Freud indicates that point in the associations where the dream is connected up to the unknown, which he calls its navel.

We've arrived at whatever it is that lies behind the mystic trio. I say *mystic* because we now know its meaning. The three women, the three sisters, the three caskets, Freud has since shown us its meaning. The last term is death, as simple as that.⁶

That in fact is what it is all about. We can even see it coming to the surface in the middle of the hubbub of speech in the second part. The story of the diphtheric membrane is directly tied to the threat, of real significance, to the life of one of Freud's daughters two years previously. Freud had taken it to be a punishment for a therapeutic blunder he'd committed when he'd given one of his patients an excessive dose of a drug, sulphonal, unaware that its habitual usage might have harmful side-effects. He thought he was thereby paying the price for his professional mistake.

In the second part, the three characters together play a ridiculous game of passing the buck with regard to these fundamental questions for Freud – What is the meaning of the neurosis? What is the meaning of the cure? How well-founded is my therapy for neurosis? And behind all this, there is the Freud who dreams whilst being a Freud who seeks the key to the dream. That is why the key to the dream is the same thing as the key to neurosis and the key to the cure.

Just as there's a highpoint in the first stage, when the apocalyptic revelation of what was there takes place, so there's also a peak in the second part. At first, directly [*immédiatement*], *unmittelbar*, just as in a delirious conviction when all of a sudden you know that it is him who's got something against you, they know that Otto's the culprit. He'd given an injection. The search is on – . . . *propyl* . . . *propylene* . . . With this is associated the very funny story of the pineapple juice⁷ which Otto had given the family the day before. When opened, it smelt of cheap spirits. It was suggested – *Let's give it to the servants*. But Freud, more humane,⁸ so he says, gently remarks: – *No, it might poison them as well.*⁹

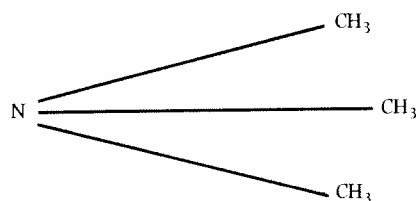
⁶ Freud, 'The Theme of the Three Caskets' (1913f) GW X 24–37; Stud X 183–93; SE XII 291–301.

⁷ 'Likör' in German text; 'jus' in French text.

⁸ 'menschenfreundlichen' in German; translated in SE as 'philanthropic'.

⁹ A compromise between Lacan's French rendition ('*Mais non, eux aussi, ça pourrait leur faire du mal.*') and the German ('*sie sollen sich auch nicht vergiften.*'), well caught, in idiomatic English, in SE: 'there was no need for them to be poisoned either.' – SE IV 116.

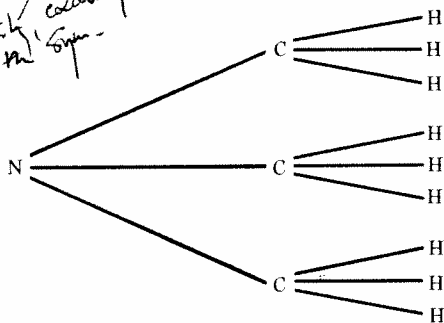
What emerges, printed in heavy type, beyond the hubbub of speech, like the *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* of the Bible, is the formula for trimethylamine. I will write this formula out for you.



This explains everything, *trimethylamine*. The dream does not only owe its meaning to Freud's research on the meaning of dreams. If he can continue to ask himself the question, it is because he asks himself if all this communicates with Fliess, in whose elucubrations trimethylamine plays a role in connection with the decomposition products of sexual substances. Indeed – I've made inquiries – trimethylamine is a decomposition product of sperm; and it gives it its ammoniacal smell when it's left to decompose in the air. The dream, which culminated a first time, when the *ego* was there, with the horrific image I mentioned, culminates a second time at the end with a formula, with its *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* aspect, on the wall, beyond what we cannot but identify as speech, universal rumour.

Like my oracle, the formula gives no reply whatsoever to anything. But the very manner in which it is spelt out, its enigmatic, hermetic nature, is in fact the answer to the question of the meaning of the dream. One can model it closely on the Islamic formula – *There is no other God but God* – There is no other word, no other solution to your problem, than the word.

We can rely on the structure of this word, which here makes its appearance in an eminently symbolic form, since it is given in sacred signs.



These three which we keep encountering, again and again, that's where, in the dream, the unconscious is – what is outside all of the subjects. The structure of the dream shows us clearly enough that the unconscious is not the *ego* of the dreamer, that it isn't Freud in the guise of Freud pursuing his conversation with Irma. It is a Freud who has come through this moment of great anxiety when his *ego* was identified with the whole in its most unconstituted form. Quite literally, he escaped, he called upon, as he himself wrote, the congress of all those who know. He fainted, was reabsorbed, was abolished behind them. And finally another voice is heard. One can play around with the alpha and omega of the thing. But even if we had N instead of AZ it would be the same nonsense – we could give the name *Nemo* to this subject outside the subject who designates the whole structure of the dream.¹⁰

So this dream teaches us the following – what is at stake in the function of the dream is beyond the *ego*, what in the subject is of the subject and not of the subject, that is the unconscious.

What does it matter to us at this point if Otto gave an injection with a dirty syringe? You can have a lot of fun with this syringe with all its everyday usages, which in German have all sorts of resonances which in French are given by the verb *gicler* [to spirt]. We are sufficiently familiar, on account of all kinds of small clues, with the importance of urethral erotism in Freud's life. One day when I am in a good mood, I'll show you that, until he was quite old, there was something in Freud in this area which clearly echoes the memory of his urinating in his parents' bedroom – to which Erikson attaches such importance. He tells us that there must have been a small chamber pot and that he can't have peed on the floor. Freud doesn't specify if he did it in the maternal chamber pot or on the carpet or the floorboards. But that is of secondary importance.

The important thing, and this dream shows us it, is that analytic symptoms are produced in the flow of a word which tries to get through. It always encounters the double resistance of what we will call just for today, because it is late, the *ego* of the subject and its image. So long as these two interpositions offer a sufficient resistance, they clarify each other, if I may put it like that, within this flow, they are phosphorescent, they flash.

That's what happens in the first phases of the dream, throughout which Freud is on the plane of resistance, playing with his patient. At a certain point in time, because it must have gone pretty far, it stops. He isn't completely wrong, Erikson, it really is because Freud was prey to such a passion for knowing that he carries on regardless.

What gives this dream its veritable unconscious value, whatever its

¹⁰ The last two sentences rely on the symbol for nitrogen in French chemical nomenclature being 'AZ' from 'azote' (from the Greek, 'a-', 'without' and 'zōē', 'life'); hence the reference to alpha and omega. 'Nemo' is Greek for 'no one'.

Word: *signifier*
signified

theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis

primordial and infantile echoes, is the quest for the word, the direct confrontation with the secret reality of the dream, the quest for signification as such. In the midst of all his colleagues, of this consensus of the republic of those who know – for if no one is right, every one is right, a law which is simultaneously paradoxical and reassuring – in the midst of this chaos, in this original moment when his doctrine is born into the world, the meaning of the dream is revealed to Freud – that there is no other word of the dream than the very nature of the symbolic.

The nature of the symbolic, I myself also want to introduce you into it by telling you, to serve you as a marker – symbols only ever have the value of symbols.

A traversal is accomplished. After the first part, the most loaded, imaginary part, something comes into the dream at the end which we could call the crowd. But it is a structured crowd, like the Freudian crowd. That is why I would prefer to introduce another term, which I will leave to your reflection with all the double meanings it contains – the inmixing [immixtion] of subjects.

The subject enters and mixes in with things – that may be the first meaning. The other one is this – an unconscious phenomenon which takes place on the symbolic level, as such decentred in relation to the *ego*, always takes place between two subjects. As soon as true speech emerges, mediating, it turns them into two very different subjects from what they were prior to speech. This means that they only start being constituted as subjects of speech once speech exists, and there is no before.

9 March 1955

XIV

The dream of Irma's injection (conclusion)

THE IMAGINARY, THE REAL AND THE SYMBOLIC

What did you get out of M. Griaule's lecture yesterday evening?¹ In what way does it relate to our customary objects? Who has had time to distil its moral? What are your impressions?

Marcel Griaule made a rapid allusion to the Islamisation of an important segment of the populations of the Sudan, to the fact that the latter continue to function with a symbolic register while belonging to a style of religious credo clearly dissonant with this system. Their demand on this level is manifested in a very precise manner, for instance when they ask to be taught Arabic, because Arabic is the language of the Koran. That's a tradition which goes a long way back, is very much alive, and appears to have all manner of means for keeping itself afloat. Unfortunately, he left us hanging in mid-air.

You mustn't get the impression that Sudanese civilisation doesn't deserve its name. We have sufficient evidence of its creations and of its metaphysics to put into question the single scale by which we think we can gauge the quality of civilisations.

Who has read Lévi-Strauss's most recent article? That is what he is alluding to – certain errors in our ways of looking at things stem from the fact that we use a single scale to gauge the quality, the exceptional character, of a civilisation. The conditions in which these people live may at first sight seem rather harsh, rather precarious from the point of view of comfort and of civilisation, but they seem nonetheless to receive very powerful support in the symbolic function, isolated as such.

It has taken a long time for us to be capable of entering into communication with them. There's an analogy here with our position *vis-à-vis* the subject.

¹ Marcel Griaule (1898–1956), ethnologist of Central African societies; author of *Les Masques des Dogons*, Paris, 1938. On 15 March 1955 he gave a lecture to the Société Française de Psychanalyse entitled 'Symbolisation of the world and the conditions for communication in the Sudanese'.